DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 096 PS 019 009

AUTHOR Mirabelli, Alan
TITLE Families in the 1990's: In Control or Out of Control.
INSTITUTION Vanier Inst. of the Family, Ottawa (Ontario).
PUB DATE 6 May 90
NOTE 26p.; Mozah E. Zemans Memorial Lecture (2nd, Vancover, British Columbia, Canada, May 6, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Dual Career Family; Economic Factors; *Employed Parents; *Family (Sociological Unit); *Family Income; Family Life; Family Problems; Foreign Countries; Fringe Benefits; *Mothers; One Parent Family; *Reproduction (Biology); Social Change; Technological Advancement; Work Environment
IDENTIFIERS Canada; *Employer Role; Reproductive Technologies

ABSTRACT

Family life in Canada is alive and well, even though it may seem at times to be under attack. Families are changing in the functions they serve. One of the significant changes has been the increase in the number of women with paying jobs outside the home. This change has not necessarily caused families to be better off economically. Today, both spouses working full time at minimum wage can earn only 92 percent of the poverty line for a family of three. In a world where two paychecks are increasingly essential for family survival, single parents have a particularly tough time. Canadian families have shown resiliency in surviving severe threats, but any working parent knows that the linear requirements of work do not fit with the cyclical responsibilities of family life. There are important consequences to juggling these two separate worlds. In particular, dual-wage and single-parent wage-earning families seem to have a steady diet of overload and need all possible support. Unfortunately, that support is rarely available at present. Employers increasingly provide a range of leaves and flexible working conditions, but they must also change corporate culture to encourage the use of these benefits by individuals with caregiving responsibilities. The ethical, legal, and human dilemmas brought about by the new reproductive technologies constitute yet another challenge to those that families must face as Canada moves into the 21st century. (RH)

PERSPECTIVES

THE VANIER INSTITUTE OF THE FAMILY / L'INSTITUT VANIER DE LA FAMILLE

120 Holland, Ottawa, Canada K1Y 0X6 (613) 722-4007

"FAMILIES IN THE 1990's: IN CONTROL OR OUT OF CONTROL"

Second Mozah E. Zemans Memorial Lecture

Alan Mirabelli
The Vanier Institute of the Family

Vancouver, May 6th 1990

"FAMILIES IN THE 1990'S: IN CONTROL OR OUT OF CONTROL"

First of all, I would like to say how honoured I am to have been asked to present the Mozah Zemans Memorial Lecture. Mozah Zemans had a long and important relationship with the organization which I represent here today - The Vanier Institute of the Family. It began almost at the beginning of the Institute itself in 1968 when she was elected to the Board of Directors. In assuming the Presidency in 1973, she expressed strong feelings about the family and its responsibility within itself and toward the community. She said that "families must have a sense of pride, of individuality and freedom to develop their own lifestyles....That we have to come to understand that family life in Canada is very varied, whether we look at family life in rural areas where we yet find many extended families, or the urban nuclear family often far away from its roots, or the native family with its tribal and family mix, or the immigrant family with its blend of homeland and new land. Transformation is already occurring in our society. Old patterns of life are ending and new ones are being built."

Mrs. Zemans' celebration of the diversity and strength of family life in Canada continued through her Presidency and her

Chairmanship of the Institute until her retirement in 1977 when she received an honorary life membership in recognition of her exceptional service and dedication to Canadian families.

Today I would like to pick up on Mozah Zemans belief that family life is alive and well and living in Canada, even though it may seem at times to be under attack and out of control.

Too often we make assumptions about families that have very little or no basis in fact. For example, we assume that there is only one kind of family - that it is a singular, homogeneous, and static thing. Many of us may feel that family life is actually more of a societal problem and a liability to a happy and successful life rather the foundation of our identities and the cornerstone of our society. We have the feeling that adolescent pregnancy is rampant and that single-parenting is a new and unique invention. On the basis of what we see and hear through the media, it often seems that family life is a series of unhappy marriages, separations, divorces, abused and exploited women, children and old people and intractable conflict between generations. Families often seem to be portrayed as places from which women and children run for safety and from which men flee to escape their responsibilities. We get the feeling that everything about family is in a state of flux and that nothing is constant.

We cannot ignore the often troubling situations that families get themselves into from time. And I don't want in any way to ignore the "down side" of family life because of course there is violence, conflict, and unhappiness. But it is important to remember, for better or worse, that the majority of Canadian marriages do last for a lifetime. Despite a recent drop in the rate of marriages, it still remains a very popular institution. In fact, 90% of Canadians will marry at least once in their lifetimes. The most likely consequence of divorce is still remarriage. In a recent national poll, Canadians declared that their family life was top of the list before jobs, salaries, political or religious convictions. The vast majority of young people still expect to marry and have at least two children. And this optimism flies in the face of their personal experience where a very large minority of them have already experienced the divorce of their parents. In fact today you ask not only how many kids a parent has but how many parents a kid has. But the commitment to family life still remains strong.

It is true to say, however, that families are changing. As Mozah Zemans recognized almost twenty years ago, THE family is really FAMILIES - single wage earning families, dual wage earning families, blended families, extended families, multi-generation families, single parent families, - all variations on the familial theme. But regardless of their outward form, the needs

and aspirations and responsibilities of families are common to all. Families are still the primary place where we care for each other, where we produce, consume and distribute goods and services, where we learn to learn and where we try and satisfy the emotional needs of individuals.

More important perhaps than the apparent changes in family forms is the change in the ways in which families PERFORM. And one of the more significant changes has been the increase in the number of women holding paying jobs outside of the home. In 1961, 61% of Canadian families were in the so-called traditional one wage-earner family. By 1981, only 16% of Canadian families were in the one wage earner category. Since 1971, the number of married women in the labour force has doubled More than 6 out of 10 women with children are now working outside of the home.

In the late sixties, the value of the so-called "family wage" began to decline. Until that time, the wage paid to a male employee was based on the assumption that such a wage would be sufficient to support both himself and a dependent spouse and children. Since then, real incomes of families have been on the decline. In fact the median family income has not grown since 1979. In the 1950's, 45-48 hours per week of paid labour was required to generate a 'family-wage'. In the 1980's, 65-75 hours of paid labour is required for the equivalent 'family-

wage'. Is it any wonder that many families have managed to keep their heads above water during the recession and through inflation and unemployment only because the once at-home spouse, usually the wife, has now entered the paid labour force for good.

The value of the minimum wage has also shrunk dramatically. In 1975, one working family member on minimum wage could earn 81% of the poverty line. Today, BOTH spouses working at minimum wage can only earn 92% of the poverty line for a family of three. In fact, according to the National Council on Welfare, the number of low-income families would rise by 62% if the wages of women could not be relied upon to make ends meet. So we are not talking greedy families here - we are talking about wives and mothers who no longer have a real choice to work outside of the home or not.

Some would argue that expectations for "the good life" have created their own pressures on young families. But I think we have to be careful about pointing a finger here because we should remember that the economies of modern industrial states require that individuals consume. And advertisers deliver the consumers. The purchasing power of families is regarded by economists as a major 'engine' of economic growth and development. Just look at the crucial role housing starts play as an indicator of economic health. And it is young families who are assuming the

enormous burden of mortgages for those housing starts. While stable families are a steady source of consumerism, separated and divorced families might even be considered a boon to the economy. When two households replace one there is now a need for two fridges, two stoves, two living room suites and so on.

The massive influx of women into the paid labour force has been a boon for the economy. Whatever the personal motivation for entering the workforce, whether for economic or for personal aspirations, women generate a very substantial chunk of tax revenues for the government. In very rough numbers, about 25% of all taxes collected on the basis of employment related income is paid by women. And in 1985, that amounted to just under 10 billion dollars collected by various levels of government. That is something to be kept in mind when politicians, policy makers and Canadians generally naively talk about how the world would be a better place if women would just go home and take care of their children. It is also something to be kept in mind when we talk about the high cost of a child care system in Canada. Given the enormous amount of revenue that women contribute to the national coffers, it would not seem too unreasonable to expect that some of that money be directed into an accessible, affordable, quality child care system. Because, in effect, women subsidized the labour force as long as they remained at home supplying informal support services to workers' families for free. Now that women in the workplace have become a crucial component of the formal

economy, those support services must now be provided by paid formal services, such as day-care, restaurant meals, home-care and so on. The only alternative would have to be a family wage sufficient to allow a dependent spouse, husband or wife, and their children to remain at home and provide these services - a very costly proposition and one that would probably be unacceptable to most families with strong interests outside of the home.

In a world where two paycheques are increasingly essential for family survival, single parents have a particularly tough time. Single-parenthood is nothing new - again we often deal in misplaced assumptions. Fifty years ago, 12.2% of Canadian families were headed by a single parent. In 1986, the figure was 12.7%, hardly any difference. But the reasons for single parenthood have changed. Fifty years ago, about 70% of lone parents were widows and widowers. Today, almost 75% of single parents have been separated, divorced or were unmarried at the time of their children's birth. There are fewer shotgun marriages and more single women keeping their babies rather than putting them up for adoption. Fifty years ago, a single parent would often return to his or her parents' home with their children. Today, a single parent family is more likely to live alone. And that family is five times more likely to be poor than a family with two parents. The female headed lone parent family suffers also from the generally disadvantaged status of women as

well as the endless problems of insufficient or defaulted support payments.

As I have said, women's increased labour force participation has been one of the most significant changes to family life in the past 25 years. The effects have been enormous, both on families themselves and on the workplace. The balancing act between work responsibilities and family responsibilities is a very difficult one and I think it is true to say that women have borne the major brunt of these two often incompatible worlds.

One of the most amazing qualities of families is their flexibility, their elasticity. Most families expand very ably to fit the demands made on them at any given time. Whether faced with a recession where family livelihoods were severely threatened, or one of the many more minor crises of everyday living, families are wonderfully resilient and manage somehow to muddle through and meet the challenge.

But any working parent can tell you that the linear requirements of work do not fit with the cyclical responsibilities of family life - or simply put, the kids don't just get sick after 5 pm and get miraculously well just before 9 am. The elderly parent doesn't need a drive to the doctors at 6.30 pm but more likely at 10 30 a.m. when an important meeting has been scheduled at work. The basement doesn't conveniently

flood on the weekend. Family responsibilities are not neat and tidy the way work responsibilities generally are. And so the balance between work and family is almost always in favour of work. Family gets squeezed in where it can and that's hard on families.

There are real and important consequences to juggling these two separate worlds. In a recent study by the Canada Employment and Immigration Advisory Council Committee on Workers with Family Responsibilities, stress resulting from such factors as time pressures, financial burdens, and "role overload" was seen as a frequent cause of increased alcohol and drug abuse, child and elder abuse, as well as problems in spousal relationships, loss of energy or "burn-out" as it is called, and a decline in the birth rate. Respondents also expressed a concern about the lack of time spent with children, the lack of childcare, the problem of children left alone after school - the latchkey kids. Almost 80% said they experienced some degree of stress or anxiety as a result of trying to cope with the conflicting demands of work and family. Over 30% said that child care or other family responsibilities had in some way limited their opportunities for advancement by creating situations in which they were unable to put in overtime or to relocate or transfer when required.

Dual-wage earning and single parent wage earning families seem to have a steady diet of overload. They share their

tiredness - they share their leftovers. The average number of hours worked per week at home and in the workplace by adults with families shows how little time there is even for leftovers. A husband with a wife and children works 65 hours per week. A woman with a husband and children works an average of 85 hours per week. And a single mother - that is without a husband- works 75 hours per week. I would draw your attention to the fact that according to these statistics, husbands cause an extra 10 hours of work per week! Women generally assume the greater responsibility for family caregiving, even when both spouses are employed. As a result, many families can be characterized as having "overtime mothers" and "undertime fathers" - with the accompanying stress, guilt, frustration, exhaustion and often, conflict.

If we look at a typical family day, we can begin to see why. Up early in the morning to get the kids dressed, (hopefully no one is showing signs of a stomach ache), breakfasts eaten, lunches made, animals fed, kids delivered to daycare or school, and in to work on time. And heaven help you if there's a snow storm that day. Then a workday with all its meetings, phone calls, clients, assembly lines, memos, and hopes that no major crisis will hit that requires overtime or even small delay because the baby-sitter is waiting and will quit if you are late again, or the school age child is at home alone and may have friends in that you don't approve of. Then the commute home-

without major traffic tie up - to prepare a reasonably nutritious meal while listening to the children's litany for the day- hopefully no one is showing signs of getting a cold because the babysitter won't accept children who have anything infectious- and if we are lucky, the kids will watch TV quietly so that we can get the meal on the table as quickly as possible. Time for some quality time perhaps because as Letty Cottin-Pogrebin suggested: "We are our dinnertimes". Baths and homework are supervised as we drop in a quick load of laundry because someone must have that special shirt for the next day. Off to hockey practice, ballet lessons, music lessons, swimming practice for the kids or community college course in microprocessing or a university course in business administration to upgrade our marketability. And then we have the parent-teacher meeting, or the community day-care meeting. And that exercise class to try and get our bodies in the kind of shape that can keep up with this ridiculous pace! And that one evening a week when we try and spend some time with an elderly parent. Then home in time for a scheduled amount of interspousal relating before we watch the National News on TV which mercifully starts at 10 pm instead of 11 since most of us can't keep awake much past 10.30 anyway. And we do have the weekends to look forward to - where we drag the kids to Canadian Tire to buy the paint for the living room which will occupy at least Saturday (after four loads of laundry) and part of Sunday when we do the yard work and fix that bicycle in time to clean up and be ready when friends drop by

for supper. Falling into bed Sunday night in order to be well rested to get up early in the morning in time to get the kids dressed, lunches made etc. etc. Families are indeed incredible. Is it any wonder they need all the support we can give them.

Unfortunately that support is few and far between these days. Because more than 50% of Canadian families move every 5 years, often to another town or province, support networks of extended family and neighbours get disrupted and cannot necessarily be relied upon to give the family much needed moral and practical support. As we know, moving disrupts school friends, child care arrangements, spousal careers, the caring for an elderly relative.

An estimated 20% to 30% of working people have some responsibility for the care of an elderly family member. This situation has become more prevalent for several reasons. We are all living longer for one thing. Also, trends in the care of both the disabled and the elderly are moving toward community or at home living as the preferred option for many who would previously have been placed in special homes. At the same time, governments have been cutting back on spending to institutional care. The result is that community and home care are accounting for a larger proportion of care. That means families, mainly the women in families, are being asked to step in. And this at a time when over 55% of Canadian women are in the labour force.

As Margaret Mead so astutely observed:

"...we now expect a family to achieve alone what no other society has ever expected an individual family to accomplish unaided. In effect, we call upon the individual family to do what a whole clan used to do."

I think it is important to remember that fact when we get the feeling that family is not performing as well as it should. Families have been remarkably resilient in absorbing everything that we throw at them. But as I have already indicated, cracks are beginning to appear.

Absenteeism in the workplace is increasing. Canadians have been absent from work for personal or family reasons twice as often in 1987 as in 1977. The greatest amount of absenteeism is the result of a breakdown in childcare arrangements. Women, particularly those with pre-school children have a higher incidence of absences than men, although I think you could find a good argument that showed that men's absenteeism is low because women's absenteeism is high. Interestingly, men stay away from the office more when there is a problem involving older children. Since very few employers provide special leave for family responsibilities, many parents must use their own sick or vacation leave to cover their absence. Women often find

themselves short of personal sick leave and vacation time since they are the ones most likely to take time off to care for a young child. Often leave is unpaid, which can create real hardship for families where two incomes are needed just to survive.

But the workplace may be changing. Employers are being forced to re-examine the fit between their employees' home and work lives. And there are good economic reasons for this. There is a growing shortage of appropriately skilled workers as well as a rapidly changing global economic system which requires a more competitive bottom line. The pool of potential workers has changed. There is no longer an "average" family with a spouse at home ready and available to accommodate the needs of the workplace - needs such as transferring from branch office to branch office. In fact, according to the Conference Board of Canada survey, 17% of employees who had been offered promotions turned them down for family reasons and almost 25% had refused transfer opportunities. From an employer's point of view, this can create a real headache in the overall running of a corporation.

Women, who represent over 44% of the labour force, have a greater risk of having to withdraw from the workplace because of difficulties in balancing work and family. From an employer's point of view, it makes good economic sense to try and make work

and family responsibilities fit better in order to keep their female employees. According to a U.S. study, administrative costs associated with hiring a new employee can run as high as 93% of an employee's first year's salary. Absenteeism due to family related responsibilities represents a major drain on the corporate bottom line. A U.S. company implemented a program for the care of sick children after realizing it was losing $165,000 per year due to parents taking time off when their children were ill. Another company estimated the cost of employee absenteeism due to family responsibilities at $250,000 per year at one branch office alone. In a Canadian survey of employers, a significant number felt that at least one quarter of the human resource problems they face in areas of absenteeism, tardiness, stress, productivity and quality of performance, are due to employees having to manage dual responsibilities at home and at work. While employers have generally responded to major catastrophic situations that their employees may encounter at home, the every-day minor catastrophic situations have been left to the employee to deal with alone. And it is the day to day shifting needs of families that can be the hardest to fit with the demands of the workplace. When you ask working parents about what would make their lives easier, at the top of the list, even more than salaries, is flexibility. Time to deal with family situations.

Employers in Canada currently provide a range of leaves to deal with a variety of family situations including maternity,

paternity, adoption, bereavement, personal sick leave for family reasons, and special leave for family reasons. Unfortunately these are not available across the country and depend to a great extent on the size of the company, the nature of any collective agreement, provincial legislation, corporate profitability and corporate culture. Corporate culture is a very important element in implementing any family responsive policy and I will return to this issue later.

As well as leave programs, flexible working conditions are also emerging as an appropriate corporate response. These can include job sharing, flextime, compressed work weeks, shorter work weeks, part time, shorter work days and at-home working arrangements. Employers are also beginning to offer services and supports directly to employees' families. For example child care referral services, workplace child care, care for sick children, after-school programs, relocation counselling, elder care referral services, support for elderly or disabled family members while an employee is on business outside of working hours, after school programs and so on. The list can be endless and innovative. In fact, employers should be encouraged to review all company policies to see how they actually affect their employees and their families.

No matter how many programs and policies are put in place, there will be little benefit if there is a reluctance on the part

of management or the employees to use those programs. This is where the corporate culture plays such an important role. Employers have to encourage a family friendly corporate attitude that recognizes the legitimacy of the needs of employees and their families outside of the workplace. And that attitude must extend to co-workers as well. In Sweden, for example, there is a wide range of paid and unpaid family leave provisions for workers. For example, men are entitled under a parental insurance program to take a leave of absence for child care. However, a recent report by the government of Sweden noted that "men who are willing to take paid leave of absence for care of their children frequently encounter derision and ridicule of their colleagues at work, particularly if the workplace is predominantly male."

These kind of attitudes contribute to the notion that family responsibilities are generally to be managed by the female employees and therefore we should make it easier for women to combine work and family. Corporate culture and indeed our culture generally, must recognize and acknowledge in practical and constructive ways that men and women share equally in the challenging task of combining work and family. Families should not feel isolated as they attempt to cope with the very real stresses and strains of caring for family members while earning a family wage. As the Government of Quebec stated in their working paper on family policy: "In the final analysis, we must strive

toward a major objective: that of according as much importance to the role of persons as parents as we do to them as workers."

Ironically, while I think many families do feel isolated and somewhat forgotten, there is no doubt that the idea of family has been rediscovered in recent years. Today, the significance of family is being touted by economists, feminists, bureaucrats, political rightists and leftists alike. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that this is happening at a time when industrial economies are experiencing serious contraction and the care and protection provided by the social welfare system is no longer guaranteed. Families are being asked to pick up what the safety net can no longer sustain. It is also a time when population growth in those same industrial nations is at an all time low. The expectations of families as producers and reproducers seem to be at an all time high.

I have been asked to take a moment to touch very briefly on a subject which relates to families as reproducers - as providers of our next generation. As I mentioned earlier, families but most especially the women in families, have assumed a major burden as they struggle to combine their productive and reproductive roles. One of the unintended consequences of the increase in women's labour force participation has been the delay in childbearing. As well, there has been an increase in the proportion of one-child families and of intentionally childless couples. Canadian adults no longer choose to have enough

children to replace themselves and present trends indicate that the Canadian population will eventually decline unless rates of immigration are increased dramatically.

At the same time, there is a small but not insignificant number of families who are willing to endure a great deal of frustration, risk and physical and emotional pain in order to have children. I am referring to the use of new reproductive technologies and the dilemmas of choice that it presents not only for potential parents but for us all.

Reproductive technologies are nothing new, they have been with us for centuries in many cases. It is the more recent conceptive technologies - those involved in the creation of new life - that have created both the greatest hopes for childless couples and the greatest apprehension for the future of human procreation. And as the technologies demand more and more the intervention of expert help and sophisticated equipment, we have to wonder if this is one area in which families are no longer in control.

There is no doubt that many of the advances in the field of human reproductive technology have grown out of the efforts to treat male or female infertility. The joy of formerly infertile couples who have become proud parents through in vitro fertilization cannot and should not be denied. Nor should the

ability to prevent the intergenerational transmission of genetic diseases be cut off. But the same technology that can determine the sex of a fetus in order to prevent the transmission of a sex-specific genetic disease can also be used to satisfy non-medical objectives of parents who, for whatever reasons, hold a preference for a boy or a girl. Genetic manipulation to ensure smart, tall, thin, attractive offspring, while possible, is certainly not preferable. We have to make a distinction between medical interventions intended to overcome infertility and other non-medical applications of the same technologies. As Susan McDaniel has written:

"Average Canadians, when they think of the new reproductive technologies such as surrogate motherhood, artificial insemination or in vitro (or test tube) fertilization, tend to think of the happiness brought to the childless couple by being able to have their own child. It seems like a miracle, a gift from science and technology, what might earlier have been called a gift from heaven. Few Canadians think beyond these happy images brought to us by the news media, to what the implications of the new reproductive technologies might mean for society, for social relations between men and women and for our fundamental relations to ourselves as women and our future."

There are many ethical issues and many perspectives that we can bring to bear on our use of new reproductive technologies.

The perspective of the infertile couple who claims a right to what most of the rest of use take for granted - children. The medical practitioner who must act in the interest of the patient and guide them through the choices they must make in terms of treatment. The scientist who seeks pure knowledge about human reproduction independent of its possible applications. The theologian who must provide guidance to individuals as they make choices on the uses of these technologies. The judge who must rule on what constitutes a mother in a case of surrogacy. Questions about the further medicalization and dehumanization of human reproduction; about the loss of control and responsibility over reproduction from women to doctors, lawyers and legislators. How does an individual's need for a child fit with the larger community's need to define acceptable standards in matters pertaining to human reproduction? What are the rights of the potentially five parents of an artificially produced child - the biological father, the father who will rear the child, the genetic mother, the gestational mother, the mother who will rear the child? And of course, who will speak for the rights of the child who must come to terms with his or her beginnings?

Never before in human history have individuals been faced with the ethical dilemmas posed by these new technologies. We must not simply decide if and when to bear children but as well, how shall we bear them, how many shall we bear, why we shall bear them, with whom we shall bear them, when we will

resort to which technologies in our attempts to bear them and, even, what kind of children we shall bear. And we will not be making these choices in isolation. The choices will be made in collaboration with doctors, medical researchers, hospital committees, and often lawyers and commercial businesses that have an interest in the technologies themselves.

Many of the questions raised by these new methods of human reproduction admit no easy answers. I have only time to touch briefly on some of them. But perhaps the most important question to be asked is - what will these new forms of parenting mean for human relationships? As Louise Vandelac stated:

"In the process of exchanging the relational for the technical, the affective for the biological, and in reducing childbearing to the pairing and functioning of organs and reproductive bodies, we see the development of new representations of the (human) being and human filiation. The technological control of conception opens new realms not only for genitors but for the whole society. It shifts our most fundamental points of reference as humans; concepts of life, death, identity, and the other, while altering the notion of the subject itself."

In the middle of all this complexity are the couples themselves and their families who need support and understanding,

who often feel isolated and vulnerable as they undertake the emotional and physical roller coaster that comes with new reproductive technologies. Something else to add to the list of new challenges facing families as we move into the 21st century.

While I have enormous faith in families' ability to creatively respond to the challenges we present to them, we have to remember that families live in a context - they live in society. Their capacity to meet the costs - financial, physical and emotional - of fulfilling both their personal aspirations and those that society places upon them are a function of larger patterns of community and societal organization. Labour markets, wage scales, income security programs, education and training opportunities, tax laws, family laws, housing, health services, community development and so on. As Mozah Zemans said in 1977 - "we have to carefully examine social structures, economic, political and cultural institutions in order to see whether they actually promote or impede the well-being of families."

Families are both the adaptor to and creator of our future. All of us here are at some stage in our relationship with our own family because family extends across households and across time for all of our lives. Family is the adaptive mechanism in society that helps us get over the rough spaces as we move from one era to another. And family does not stop at our front door.

So much of the quality of our family life depends on what kind of community we live in and where we are in that community. The parks, the bus routes, the neighbourhood organization, the drop in centres, and yes, even the shopping malls, all impinge on family life. Starting with our own street - what kind of neighbours can we be for each other? What we do in community we also do for our family and our families. And what we do for our families we also do for our community. Because a community that has good outreach and a good capacity to nurture at the community level can really strengthen a weakened family.

Families need and deserve our support. And that support begins in our homes as we re-examine the roles of men and women in order to share equally in the responsibilities that are family. It extends into our neighbourhoods, our religious communities, our social service systems. It must become part of our workplace and our corporate culture. It must become the cornerstone of government policies and programs to reflect our society's commitment to the well-being of all families, everywhere.